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ABSTRACT

The report evaluates a proposed San Ramon Valley Center community college and responds to California legislative requirements that the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) advise the legislature and governor regarding new institutions and campuses of public higher education. The report concludes that the San Ramon Valley Center should be approved as a permanent educational center, and that it should become eligible to compete for capital outlay funding beginning with the 1999-2000 fiscal year. Issues addressed include enrollment projections (6,000 students when completed); consideration of alternatives (such as expansion or increased utilization of existing institutions); the proposed institution's ability to serve disadvantaged students; academic planning; geographic and physical accessibility; effects on other institutions; environmental impact; and economic efficiency. Individual sections discuss the Commission's role in the review of new campuses and centers; improving the efficiency of CPEC reviews; history of the proposal; a review of the Commission's criteria; and conclusions and recommendations. (DB)

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Review of the Proposed San Ramon Valley Center of the Contra Costa Community College District

Summary

The Contra Costa Community College District occupies 686 square miles of territory that is virtually contiguous with the boundaries of Contra Costa County. Serving a population of 916,000 in the State's ninth largest county, the district operates three comprehensive community colleges and one major educational center: Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill (22,094 students), Contra Costa College in San Pablo (8,520 students), Los Medanos College in Pittsburgh (8,934 students), and the Center for Higher Education (CHE) in San Ramon (3,200 students). The district, with approval from the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges on May 11, is proposing to relocate the CHE -- to be renamed the San Ramon Valley Center (SRVC)-- to a permanent 15-acre site in a new commercial/residential development (Dougherty Valley). Land for the facility will be donated by the developers, with the district contributing $6 million and the State approximately $9 million over a period of three or four years. It is anticipated that the center will serve approximately 6,000 students when completed. A map of the district, with the proposed location of the center, is shown in Display 1.

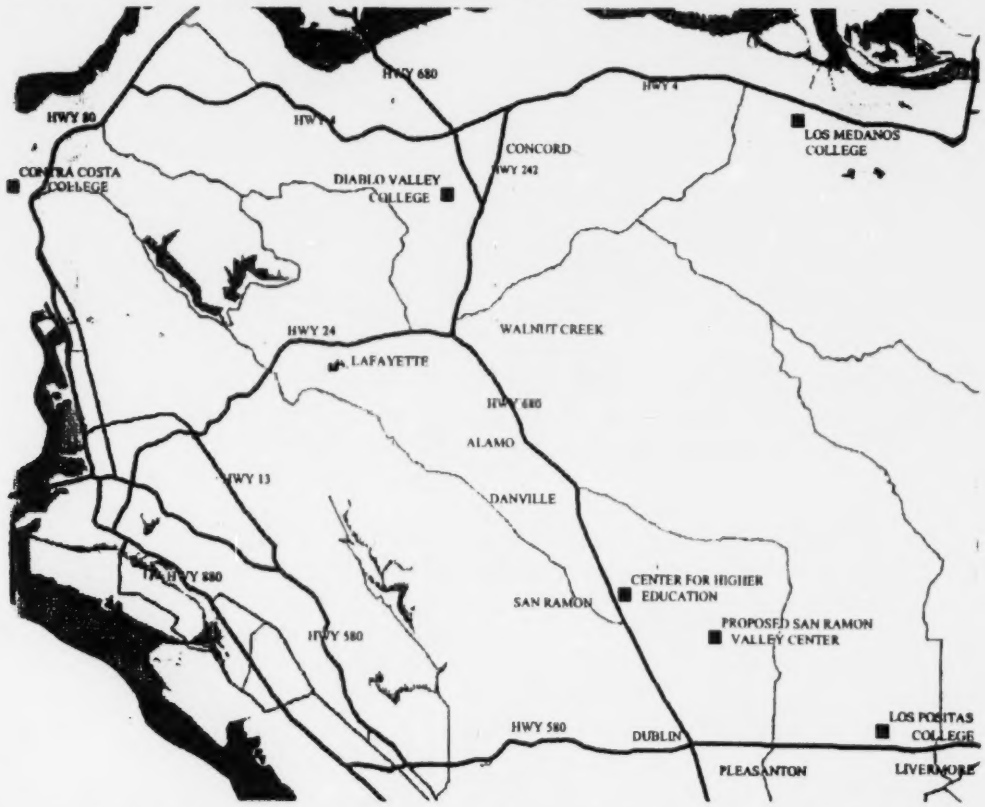
The Commission's Role in the Review of New Campuses and Centers

The Commission is charged by statute to "advise the Legislature and the Governor regarding the need for and location of new institutions and campuses of public higher education." (Education Code 66903) In addition, Section 66904 provides:

> It is further the intent of the Legislature that California community colleges shall not receive state funds for acquisition of sites or construction of new institutions, branches, or off-campus centers unless recommended by the commission.

Pursuant to this legislation, the Commission has, since 1975, adopted and revised a series of guidelines and procedures by which proposals for new campuses shall be reviewed. The most recent iteration of this document, *Guidelines for Review of Proposed University Campuses, Community Colleges, and Educational Centers* was approved about seven years ago (CPEC, 1992). It requests each of the public systems to develop a plan that identifies the need for new institutions over a 15-year period. Once that plan is submitted, the Commission requests the governing board to submit more detailed short-term plans for specific new campuses and centers through a "Letter of Intent to Expand" that contains such items as the location of the proposed facility and preliminary enrollment and budget plans. If the Commission's Executive Director reviews that letter favorably, the system is invited to submit a more comprehensive "Needs Study" that responds to 10 criteria that are used to determine the proposal's merits. If that study is reviewed favorably by the Com-

DISPLAY 1 Map of the Contra Costa Community College District



mission, a recommendation for approval, and eligibility for State capital outlay funding, is offered to the Governor and the Legislature.

Improving the efficiency of CPEC reviews

In the more than 20 years that the Commission has reviewed proposals for new institutions from each of the three public systems, it has been standard practice to present comprehensive reports explaining virtually every detail of the proposal in depth. In part, the Commission has pursued this course of action because of concerns that the reports offered by the governing boards were insufficiently comprehensive to afford the Legislature and the Governor the data and information they needed to make an informed judgment on the advisability of the proposal. In more recent times, however, the Commission has come to believe that segmental diligence in reviewing proposals for new institutions -- particularly from the community colleges -- has improved dramatically, with the result that there is less need for comprehensive reports. In addition, the Commission has initiated an internal process of reviewing its own priorities and procedures, and is endeavoring to find ways to conduct its business more efficiently. The ultimate result is an effort to offer reviews of new educational center proposals in a "Higher Education Update" format, an approach that contains as much staff analysis as before, but saves both time and resources in the final product.

In some cases, as when new campuses are proposed, or when a center proposal appears to be particularly controversial, the Commission may determine that it is prudent to develop a more lengthy report. Such decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis in the future.

History of the Proposal

As Display 1 shows, the Contra Costa District's three colleges are all located along the northern tier of the county, with a substantial gap between Diablo Valley College in Pleasant Hill and Las Positas College in Livermore. The Contra Costa District once intended to fill that gap with a comprehensive college in the San Ramon Valley, but the defeat of a local bond issue in the late 1960s put expansion plans on hold for almost 20 years. In that period of stasis -- and occasional retrenchment -- caused by the periodic economic reversals that plagued California from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, the district offered only limited outreach services to the southern Contra Costa County area. In 1985, however, the district entered into a consortium with University of California Extension and the Division of Extended Education of California State University, Hayward and opened the CHE in the Bishop Ranch business park in

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San Ramon. Today, the district leases 25,000 square feet of space in an office building that contains 19 classrooms and support facilities, and enrolls an average of 3,200 students in the fall and spring terms, with about 1,800 additional students in the summer. These students produce just over 1,000 full-time-equivalent students, about double the number required to qualify for permanent educational center status.

The search for a permanent facility to serve the southern region of Contra Costa County has a long and often difficult history. At various times, the district has endeavored to secure a specific site, or enter into a partnership with the San Ramon Valley School District, the City of San Ramon, or the United States Army's Camp Parks, all to no avail. In addition, the proximity of Las Positas College in Livermore (see Display 1) produced concerns in both the Chabot-Las Positas Community College District and the Commission that services may be unnecessarily duplicated, concerns that led to the rejection of a previous Letter of Intent (LOI) by the Commission's Executive Director in 1992. Although approved by the Chancellor's Office because it conformed to Board of Governor's long-range plan, Commission staff rejected the proposal because: (1) no specific site was named; (2) it was unclear from the LOI whether an educational center or a comprehensive college was actually being proposed; (3) the general location seemed to be too close to Las Positas College; and (4) no cooperative agreements with the Chabot-Las Positas CCD were in evidence.

In spite of this setback, the district continued to believe that the CHE could not adequately address the San Ramon Valley's long-term needs, and accordingly sought to find ways that the Commission's objections could be overcome. This led to a series of meetings among Commission staff, the Chancellor's Office, and district officials that culminated in a new Letter of Intent dated October 9, 1997, and to a Needs Study that was submitted a year later in October 1998.

The 1997 Letter of Intent represented the culmination of extensive negotiations with the developers of the Dougherty Valley Development Project (Shapell and Windemere Ranch) that finally produced a donated site of 15-acres on which the district could build a permanent center in a commercial enclave known as the Village Center. The location of that site is also shown in Display 1 as the "Proposed San Ramon Valley Center." Dougherty Valley will be the largest development project in Contra Costa County history and will produce a community of 30,000 people and 11,000 homes on 2,379 acres of land. The district and the developers signed a memorandum of understanding for the 15-acre site in February 1996.

Negotiations between the district and the developers, however, did not resolve the difficulties with Chabot-Las Positas, where the governing board approved a resolution in May 1997 formally opposing the SRVC on the grounds that it was too close to Las Positas College and would, accordingly, hinder that college's planned development.

That resolution by the Chabot-Las Positas Board led to a series of meetings between officials of both districts attended by Chancellors Ronald A. Kong (Chabot-Las Positas) and Charles Spence (Contra Costa), as well as staff from the statewide Chancellor's Office and the California Postsecondary Education Commission. Ultimately, while these meetings failed to produce a clear consensus, the Contra Costa District did agree to an increase in the capacity of Diablo Valley College, as well as to a reduction in both the size and service area of the SRVC, both of which actions should relieve any undue pressure on Las Positas College. Further, President Mark Edelstein of Diablo Valley College (the SRVC's host campus) and President Susan A. Cota of Las Positas College have agreed to a cooperative relationship that should work to the benefit of both institutions.

A Review of the Commission's Criteria

The Commission's criteria for reviewing new community college educational centers are listed below. Taken together, they are designed to ensure that the proposed new institution can attract a sufficient number of students to be programmatically and fiscally viable, that alternatives to establishing the facility have been considered, that potential conflicts with neighboring institutions will be minimized and cooperation with those institutions emphasized, that an academic plan has been developed, and if possible, that the State will be relieved of at least part of the financial burden of building the new center. Using these criteria, the Commission's review of the San Ramon Valley Center proposal is as follows.

Enrollment Projections -- Enrollment projections must be sufficient to justify the establishment of the "new institution". . . For a proposed new educational center, enrollment projections for each of the first five years of operation (from the center's opening date), must be provided. As the designated demographic agency for the State, the Demographic Research Unit has the statutory responsibility for . . . district enrollment projections. For a proposed new institution, the Unit will approve all projections of undergraduate enrollment developed (by) the community college district proposing the new institution.

As noted earlier, the district maintains three colleges plus the Center for Higher Education in the Bishop Ranch com-

plex in San Ramon. As of the district's most recent five-year plan, districtwide enrollment was about 40,000 headcount students, with 62 percent of the workload (Weekly Student Contact Hours or WSCH) at Diablo Valley College (DVC), which includes the CHE. Through the year 2010, it is anticipated that enrollment will grow by 20.6 percent or over 8,400 students, with a large percentage of that growth occurring in the San Ramon Valley.

At the time the district submitted its needs study for the SRVC, it was assumed that DVC was at capacity, but that capacity has now been increased by the district by about 2,000 additional students in order to reduce the potential service area for the SRVC, and consequently allay concerns that the center may draw students away from Las Positas College. The effect of that decision is a reduction in the enrollment projection for the SRVC to the numbers shown in Display 2. This projection was approved by the Demographic Research Unit of the Department of Finance by letter dated February 11, 1998 (DOF, 1998).

DISPLAY 2 Department of Finance Approved Enrollment Projection for the San Ramon Valley Center of the Contra Costa Community College District

Year	Headcount Enrollment	Weekly Student Contact Hours (WSCH)
2000	4,949	47,900
2005	5,485	53,091
2010	5,893	57,042

In the community colleges generally, a full-time-equivalent student (FTES) represents about 15 WSCH of workload. Consequently, the enrollment projection suggests that the district expects the SRVC to serve 3,802 FTES by the year 2010, for an average of 9.68 WSCH per student. This workload level is almost identical to the districtwide average for the three full-service community colleges (9.74), and would be an unusually high WSCH average for an educational center. Currently (1996-97 is the latest year available), the CHE averages a much lower 4.3 WSCH per enrollment in the fall term, and 4.0 WSCH per enrollment in the spring term. The summer term has an even lighter workload of 2.5. Given the CHE's current enrollment of about 3,200 students per term, and the projected levels in the new center of between 5,500 and 6,000 students, it seems likely that the more extensive course offerings made possible by the larger enrollment will probably increase the WSCH per student, but to project a workload that would match the district average appears to the Commission to be unreasonable. A far more likely figure, one that would conform to experience with other community college educational centers around the State, would be 5-6 WSCH per headcount enrollment, an average that would produce between 29,465 and 35,358 WSCH per term, and 1,964 to 2,357 FTES, by the year 2010.

The Contra Costa District appears to have recognized this difficulty by revising its five-year plan downward to reflect the probability of lighter workloads per student. The new figures suggest WSCH counts of between 40,144 and 43,174 for the five-year period beginning in 2000, and ending in 2005. These reduced totals suggest a workload of about eight contact hours per student, a number the Commission believes is still too high, but which at least recognizes the probability that student course loads at the SRVC will be lower than at the comprehensive campuses.

Whichever workload figure finally emerges at the new center, all of the projections suggest a strong need for the SRVC, and none reduces its eligibility under the Commission's *Guidelines*, since the latter require only that a permanent center maintain a minimum projected enrollment of 500 FTES. The SRVC should easily reach that number, probably on the day it opens.

Consideration of Alternatives -- Proposals for new institutions should address at least the following alternatives: . . . the expansion of existing institutions; the increased utilization of existing institutions, particularly in the afternoons and evenings, and during the summer months; the shared use of existing or new facilities and programs with other postsecondary education institutions, in the same or other public systems or independent institutions; the use of nontraditional modes of instructional delivery, such as "colleges without walls" and distance learning through interactive television and computerized instruction; and private fund raising or donations of land or facilities for the proposed new institution.

A cost-benefit analysis of alternatives, including a consideration of alternative sites for the new institution, must be articulated and documented.

The Contra Costa District has considered a wide range of alternatives over a period of many years, implemented several of them in addition to proposing the new center, and now believes that every reasonable option to the current proposal has been thoroughly examined.

The district's original plan in the 1960s was to build a full-service college in the county's southern region. That option was ultimately rejected due to land costs, the defeat of a bond issue, and the concerns of Chabot-Las Positas. The possibility of increasing the size of existing institutions has been implemented by increasing Diablo Valley College's master plan enrollment ceiling by 2,000 students. Increased utilization has also been implemented, with the CHE operating in the evenings, on weekends, and during the summer,

a schedule that will be transferred to the SRVC. Facility sharing is also a reality, as many of the center's current students are simultaneously enrolled at DVC, and with plans in the works for Las Positas College to offer courses at the new center. Planning for the use of technology is in the early stages, but the developers of the housing project will build modern technology into all of the houses to be constructed, which will facilitate internet access to courses that can originate at the new center. Further, video conferencing has been used for some time between DVC and the CHE, and will be transferred to the SRVC. Finally, the land for the site will be donated by the developers, with the district contributing $6 million in local funds for infrastructure development. The State's contribution to constructing the facility is currently projected at $9.05 million, less than half of the total estimated cost for Phase I.

As noted earlier in this report, the district has considered alternative sites for many years, and finally settled on the Dougherty Valley development as the only viable possibility.

Serving Disadvantaged Students -- The new institution must facilitate access for disadvantaged and historically underrepresented groups.

The district currently offers a typical array of services at the Center for Higher Education. These include admission, assessment, orientation, advisement, registration, student financial aid, vocational rehabilitation assistance, veterans' aid, placement advising, and Extended Opportunity and Program Services (EOPS). All of these services are essential to facilitating access and retention of disadvantaged and underrepresented groups. They will be transferred to the new center.

Academic Planning -- The programs projected for the new institution must be described and justified.

Most community college educational centers tend to offer a limited curriculum with strong emphases in business, social sciences, English as a second language, and information technology. The Center for Higher Education's curriculum, which is very similar to the plans for the San Ramon Valley Center, is considerably more diverse not only in traditional, semester-length courses and programs, but also in its scheduling, in that many short-term courses are offered as well. As of Spring 1998, courses were offered in 31 disciplines, as shown in Display 3 below.

Once the SRVC is built, the district plans to increase enrollment from the current level of about 3,500 to between 4,500 and 5,000. As that occurs, the district plans to expand offerings to include chemistry and physics (laboratories), as well a marine biology, cultural geography, and historical geography. In addition, vocational programs in engineering, computer graphics, technical writing, and sports medicine are also proposed.

DISPLAY 3 Center for Higher Education Curriculum, Spring 1998

Admin. of Justice	Family Life	Oceanography
Anthropology	Film	Philosophy
Art	Geography	Physical Education
Astronomy	Geology	Physics
Biology	Health Science	Political Science
Business	History	Psychology
Computer Network Tech.	Humanities	Respiratory Therapy
	Japanese	Sociology
Computer Science	Management	Spanish
Economics	Mathematics	Speech
English	Music	

Geographic and Physical Accessibility -- The physical, social, and demographic characteristics of the location and surrounding service areas for the new institution must be included. There must be a plan for student, faculty, and staff transportation to the proposed location. (A) reasonable commuting time for students, defined generally as not exceeding a 30-45 minute automobile drive (including time to locate parking) for a majority of the residents of the service area, must be demonstrated.

The proposed site for the San Ramon Valley Center is about five to six miles from Interstate Highway 680, 24 miles from Diablo Valley College, and in the immediate vicinity of the largest housing development in the county's history. There should be no question about the accessibility of the center to the surrounding population, and it is reasonable to presume that as Dougherty Valley is developed, various public transportation services will be made available as needed.

The much larger question is the proximity of the proposed center to Las Positas College, an issue that is discussed in the next section.

Effects on Other Institutions -- Other systems, institutions, and the community in which the new institution is to be located should be consulted during the planning process, especially at the time that alternatives to expansion are explored. Strong local, regional, and/or statewide interest in the proposed facility must be demonstrated by letters of support from responsible agencies, groups, and individuals.

The Contra Costa District has submitted numerous letters of support from business leaders, local government officials, and educational institutions. Among them are letters from Solano College in Suisun, California State University, Hayward, the Peralta Community College District, San Joaquin Delta College in Stockton, the San Ramon Valley Unified School District, the Contra Costa County Office of Education, and Napa Valley College. Support of this type is typical of proposals for new community college campuses or centers, yet support for the new center is not unanimous, as there is official opposition from the Chabot-Las Positas District on the grounds that the San Ramon Valley Center will be located only 10 miles (about 20 minutes driving time) from Las Positas College.

As noted above, there is a history of disagreement and negotiation between the two districts that dates back at least eight years. Those difficulties led to the Contra Costa district's decision to abandon the idea of a full-service campus and concentrate instead on an educational center to serve the residents of the district's southern tier. While this decision to downsize the new facility helped alleviate some concerns in Livermore, it did not remove the general objection to a new facility so close to Las Positas College.

Throughout 1997 and into 1998, there were numerous contacts between the two districts, and several actions by each of the respective governing boards. On May 18, 1997, the Contra Costa board decided to move ahead, while expressing its sensitivity "to regional considerations" and its willingness "to manage growth of the center in an incremental way that ensures respect for the service area demographics of adjacent community college districts." Two days later, the Chabot board unanimously passed a resolution to ". . . oppose the development of a center in the Dougherty Valley which would be in close proximity, approximately seven miles, to Las Positas College."

When the Commission received the October 9, 1997 Letter of Intent (LOI), Executive Director Warren Fox wrote to Chancellor Thomas Nussbaum with a recommendation that the Chancellor use his good offices to resolve the dispute between the two districts. Chancellor Nussbaum responded on February 19, 1998 with an approval of the LOI, and the strong suggestion that negotiations between the districts continue, that every effort to coordinate programs be undertaken, and that growth at the new center be closely controlled.

Further meetings continued into 1998, with Contra Costa making additional efforts to diminish any possible conflicts with Las Positas College. These included increasing master plan enrollment limits at Diablo Valley College, reducing the number of zip codes of the SRVC service area, reducing the square footage in the proposed center, and creating an academic plan that will minimize any possible competition with Las Positas. There were also direct communications between the presidents of Diablo Valley College and Las Positas College, with evidence of a growing spirit of cooperation and coordination.

At this point in the process, and while the Chabot-Las Positas Board remains in formal opposition to the new center, it appears that there is a growing spirit of cooperation among both college administrators and faculty in the two districts. The Commission sincerely hopes that that spirit will continue in the coming years.

Environmental Impact -- The proposal must include a copy of the final environmental impact report. To expedite the review process, the Commission should be provided all information related to the environmental impact report process as it becomes available to responsible agencies and the public.

The proposed center is located within a specific development area approved by the City of San Ramon as part of the General Plan. As of this writing, the developers are completing work on an environmental impact report (EIR) for the entire project, of which the SRVC will be a small part. That plan is being prepared with close cooperation among all of the affected agencies in the area, including the Contra Costa Community College District. The district has indicated a willingness to submit a copy of the EIR once it is completed.

Economic Efficiency -- . . . priority shall be given to proposals for new institutions where the State of California is relieved of all or part of the financial burden. When such proposals include gifts of land, construction costs, or equipment, a higher priority shall be granted to such projects than to projects where all costs are born by the State . . . .

The Contra Costa CCD has submitted a preliminary budget that clearly satisfies this criterion. It is shown in Display 4, and totals $15,050,000 plus the value of the donated site, which probably represents a State and local saving of several million additional dollars.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The proposal to construct the San Ramon Valley Center on a 15-acre site within the Dougherty Valley development project has a long and difficult history. Originally conceived as a full campus in the late 1960s, the Contra Costa Community College District has often been frustrated by a host of problems ranging from defeated bond issues to land costs to economic downturns to reservations by the Commission to opposition from the Chabot-Las Positas Community College District, the last two on the grounds that it will be lo-

DISPLAY 4 Preliminary Ten-Year Capital Outlay Cost Schedule for the San Ramon Valley Center of the Contra Costa Community College District

Item	Source of Funding	Year and Amount 1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
Site Acquisition	Developer	N/A	N/A	N/A
Offsite and Onsite Infrastructure	Local	$6,000,000	$0	$0
Planning and Working Drawings	State	$0	$650,000	$0
Construction -- Initial Facilities	State	$0	$0	$7,500,000
Equipment -- Initial Facilities	State	$0	$0	$900,000
Subtotal		$6,000,000	$650,000	$8,400,000
Grand Total	$15,050,000 plus the value of the donated site			

cated close enough to Las Positas College to adversely impact that college's normal growth. All of these problems persuaded the Contra Costa District that major revisions in its planning for the southern tier of its district were needed, revisions that have substantially reduced the scope of the project.

Were the Contra Costa District intending to build a full-service college, the Commission would probably be unable to offer the Governor and the Legislature a favorable recommendation, but since the project has now been reduced from a 100-acre full-service college to a 15-acre permanent educational center, it is possible for the Commission to reach the overall conclusion that an underserved area of Contra Costa County will now receive a measured level of instructional offerings that will meet needs without unreasonably encroaching on the much larger and more fully developed Las Positas College. In addition, the Commission believes that growth in both southern Contra Costa County and the Livermore Valley is so strong that it is likely that both institutions will prosper in future years. This likelihood is further enhanced by the fact that Presidents Mark Edelstein and Susan Cota of Diablo Valley and Los Positas Colleges, respectively, are cooperating on a regular basis in a mutual effort to ensure success throughout the region. The Commission regards this kind of collaborative effort for the common good to be highly positive and praiseworthy.

Accordingly, the Commission offers the following conclusions and recommendations regarding the San Ramon Valley Center:

Conclusions

1. The Commission believes that the Contra Costa Community College District has satisfied all of the elements of the Commission's *Guidelines* for the review of new educational centers.

2. With regard to enrollment projections, the Commission believes the projection of weekly student contact hours -- and hence full-time-equivalent students -- is probably high and should be reduced by about 40 percent to reflect more realistic estimates of workload per headcount enrollment. This should reduce FTES from the initial projected level of 3,200 FTES to just over 1,800 FTES, still more than three times as many as required to qualify under the Commission's 500 FTES minimum threshold.

3. The Commission is persuaded that the existence and success of the San Ramon Valley Center will not adversely impact the growth prospects for Las Positas College, and that the existence of the college and the center in the same general vicinity may enhance overall offerings and better serve the residents of both southern Contra Costa and eastern Alameda Counties.

4. The Commission is also persuaded that if the Contra Costa District does not take advantage of the generous offer by Shapell and Windemere Ranch, the Dougherty Valley developers, it is likely that the district will be faced with future land prices so prohibitively expensive that it will not be able to extend quality services to the area at all.

Recommendation

1. The Commission recommends that the San Ramon Valley Center of the Contra Costa Community College District be approved as a permanent educational center, and that it therefore become eligible to compete for capital outlay funding beginning as of the 1999-00 fiscal year.

References

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